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WASHINGTON -- Giving more American college students an international education is key to addressing the United States' increasing security and diplomacy challenges in the Middle East and economic challenges from China and India, according to a report to be released Monday.

The Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Study Abroad Program, first proposed by the late Sen. Paul Simon of Illinois, asks Congress to eventually provide \$125 million per year so that 1 million U.S. college students can study all over the world at a time of increasing concern over spending and the federal deficit.

"This is a critical component of the country's future," said commission Chairman Peter McPherson, president emeritus of Michigan State University. "I suppose there's no good time to ask for money. But this is not a frill. It's a need for economic competitiveness and national security."

About 190,000 students currently study abroad each year. Most of those students are white women, and two-thirds study in European countries.

The commission, which includes Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.) and Rep. Mark Kirk (R-Ill.), wants to increase the diversity of students studying abroad--in both demographics and destinations. To do it, the report recommends that Congress spend \$50 million for the 2007-08 school year, increasing the amount incrementally to \$125 million per year by 2011.

Those funds would help 1 million students--half of all those receiving a degree each year--to study abroad.

Commissioners said the value of their recommendations comes from a stronger education for American students.

"The United States' capacity to lead in the 21st Century demands that we school new generations of students in cultural and social realities beyond what they may have grown up with in the United States," Durbin said in a statement.

Under the Lincoln program, students who take between three and 12 credits would be eligible for a scholarship; students who take more than 12 hours would receive a fellowship. The amounts would be as much as \$5,000. Students would be selected on merit, but the amount of award would be need-based. Universities and community colleges could apply for grants to fund study abroad.

The commission's report also recommends that the demographics of students studying abroad more closely mirror the demographics of college students nationwide. Also, the report states that no less than 85 percent of the funds should go directly to funding the scholarships and fellowships.

According to the report, more than 65 federal agencies need translators with in-country experience. One in six American jobs today is tied to international trade, but only one in five Americans holds a passport, the report states.

"A student today is not fully educated if there is no global component," said William DeLauder, the commission's executive director.

If current growth rates of 9 percent to 10 percent continue, about 640,000 students will study abroad in 2016-17. But the report also recommends that after schools receive a grant, they must maintain 80 percent of the increased study-abroad opportunities the funds provided. That, the commission says, should mean 1 million students.

Many schools are taking steps on their own to send more students abroad. Harvard University recently announced plans to make studying abroad a degree requirement.